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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**REDISCOVERING SOUTH AMERICA**

*South America is ready to "participate in mankind's great hope -- freedom is within our grasp."*  
**President Eduardo Frei of Chile, 27 February 1997**

CORE COURSE 5604 ESSAY

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CLASS OF 1997  
COURSE 5604 -- THE GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT  
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<b>Report Documentation Page</b>			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE <b>1997</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997</b>		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Rediscovering South America</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>National War College,300 5th Avenue,Fort Lesley J. McNair,Washington,DC,20319-6000</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT <b>see report</b>				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>10</b>
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>		19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON

## **Introduction**

In November 1996 at a press conference following the Sixth Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, Chile, President Eduardo Frei of Chile summarized the thinking of South America today when he stated. "There has been an extraordinary solidarity from all the Ibero-American countries to help consolidate the democratic process and to follow it up. Even some regional agreements like Mercosur (common market of the South) include democratic safeguard clauses. We think this effort is important. We think that as we made progress in this summit and in the regional agreements, there is currently no Latin American country with an expansionist objective. On the contrary, we are all in favor of peace."<sup>1</sup> This statement, coming on the heels of the 1994 Summit of Americas, where all but one of the 35 Western Hemisphere nations agreed to 23 prioritized initiatives consisting of over 150 individual action items spanning the next 10 years, shows the dramatic democratic changes occurring in South America following the "lost decade" of the 1980's. The United States, while not a member of the Ibero-American Summit, is intensely encouraged by the advancement of South American nations during the 1990's and is strongly supportive of the emerging peaceful, democratic, free market economies of South America. The lingering question, in light of past attempts at democratic reforms in South America, is -- will the reforms of the 1990's last? Additionally, what role should the United States play in these reforms and what role will the nations of South America allow the United States to play? In this essay we will first identify four U.S. national interests in South America, in the context of its history. Second, we will present four primary U.S. policy objectives for this region and initiatives to achieve these objectives. Third, we will conclude with the future outlook for the region. This outlook is very bright due to the current progressive thinking in South America. A change that presents the U.S. with a unique "window of opportunity" to further its interests in the region. The progressive thinking now evident in South America took hold concurrent with the end of the Cold War in 1989 and resulted in a significant reduction in the ideological barriers between nations of this region. Ultimately this has led to an explosion of democratic reforms throughout South America.

South America encompasses a group of nations with a great deal in common. They have a common “language and culture, religion and society, history and destiny.”<sup>2</sup> It is also a region built on its own proud heritage that differs significantly from the founding precepts of the United States. The United States was founded by “individuals” who sought freedom from European persecution and desirous of independent commerce. As a result, in the United States the “individual” reigns supreme. South America however, was founded by the “state”, namely Spain and Portugal, to gain wealth for these countries. As a result, all authority rested in viceroys put in place to collect gold and riches, for the monarchs of Spain and Portugal. This created a dependent South American society where all authority rested in a doctrine of “state” supremacy. It is in this context that the United States formulates its national interests and aspirations for South America, as well as forms policies to attain these interests.

### **U.S. National Interests**

While the United States has a number of national interests in South America there are four that lead the list. First, among these national interests is strengthening the defense of the United States by shaping a South America free of weapons of mass destruction and associated delivery vehicles. This is because such weapons could directly threaten U.S. security. Further, by establishing sound democratic civil-military institutions in South America, namely civilian control of the military. Second, is to strengthen the prosperity of the U.S. by creating a South America of open markets, with free commerce, ultimately resulting in a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The United States views open markets as the avenue to economic prosperity, creating a vibrant middle class, long-term stability, and consumer markets for U.S. goods. Third, is to manage socially threatening transnational issues -- primarily eradicating illegal drug trade and terrorism, but also coping with environmental and migration problems. Fourth, is to strengthen the U.S. way of life by encouraging the development of functioning democracies in South America, respectful of human rights, and the rule of law. Democratic governments are the best way to secure the long-

term growth and stability of South America by creating the mechanisms to achieve the first three U.S. national interests outlined above. To accomplish these national interests the United States must respond with four policy initiatives.

### **Building Democratic Civilian-Military Institutions**

The first objective of U.S. policy in South America is to build strong democratic civilian-military relations in a hemisphere free of weapons of mass destruction and associated delivery systems. While current democracies in the region may be characterized as fragile, Ibero-American leaders have expressed solidarity in their willingness to consolidate the democratic process and to follow it up.<sup>3</sup> This then provides the impetus for effective governmental activities. It sets the stage for establishment of state sponsored infrastructures, taxation and development, and enforcement of rules and regulations governing all operations. The government then becomes a fully functional entity with a military subservient to democratically elected civilian control.

As a starting point, the U.S. must seek to outwardly support the measures set in motion by the Ibero-American leaders and foster U.S.-Latin American heightened military to military involvement and training. While the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, established a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in Latin America, it is the men and women of the Latin American armed forces who will persevere to ensure continued compliance. This is a compliance founded on the principles of democratic government, the separateness of military control of the state, and an economy that is conducive to the well-being of all state members.

Continued U.S. military involvement in the region will serve to foster these relationships, strengthen the democracies, and promote in-state defense leadership. These types of actions will serve as the building block for initiatives to create a unified Western Hemisphere security foundation. This foundation can then operate in the interest of all American nation-states, based on an economy of force, and maximized through multilateral credibility.

## Promoting Economic Prosperity

The second U S policy objective in South America is promotion of economic prosperity through an “open and fair trade policy and the building of an FTAA” by the year 2005. While state and regional stability are the keys to an open market, it flourishes best in capitalistic societies, founded on the principles of free market enterprise. Not only must the United States become directly engaged through its bilateral relationships, but must take the lead in multilateral initiatives to seek and solidify Western Hemisphere implementation of the principles of FTAA for 2005.

The region is currently on a threshold of emergence. Direct U S investment in Latin America is at an all time high. Close to one fifth of the total U S investment worldwide in 1992 was in South America. Argentina and Brazil account for more than one half of Latin America’s GDP.<sup>4</sup> South America is the world’s fourth largest integrated market, moving steadily toward a common market identification for services, capital and labor. The projected GDP growth rate for 1997 is estimated from a low of 2.0% for Costa Rica and Jamaica to a high of 6.5% for Chile.<sup>5</sup> Strong economic growth is underpinning democratic reforms in Latin Americans. The capitalistic economy may be dubbed the number one social engine of change. The economy remains an overall solid performer thanks in part to the forward thinking of the leadership of Chile, and the formulation of the southern common market, *Mercosur*, a visionary creation of determined political leaders.

Democratic and free market forces are present in South America, and since the United States is geographically linked to the region, success in the Southern Hemisphere means success for the entire Hemisphere. The U S must move forward to provide economic incentives to prospective investors and continue to draw large Latin America consumer groups into the global economy.

## Transnational Issues

While no South American nation poses a direct national security threat to the United States, our citizens, our borders, and our democratic institutions (as well as our economic well being) are

at risk from the effects of illegal drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, environmental degradation, and international terrorism

In the fight against illegal drugs, the United States has shifted its emphasis from transit interdiction to a more balanced approach, working with key drug-producing countries to build civil institutions, destroy trafficking organizations, and stop drugs as near the source of production as possible. The administration is also targeting the problem of the endemic corruption in which narcotics trafficking thrives, through efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in key countries.

It should be noted that these same institution-building and anti-corruption measures are essential in halting the flow of illegal immigrants, and contribute to economic development. Sustainable development, in turn, is necessary before meaningful progress can be made to halt environmental degradation. Thus, most of our efforts are interrelated.

While incidents of terrorism in South America have declined, terrorism is still considered a serious threat to the region's security, and it has been far ahead of the world in the number of anti-U.S. attacks. Along with confidence-building measures, counter-narcotics and counterterrorism received prominent attention at the 1994, Miami, Summit of the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Of the 321 worldwide terrorist incidents in 1994, 58 were in Latin America. This was a 40 percent decrease from 1993, and in overall incidents the region was third behind the Middle East (115) and Western Europe (88), but 44 of the 58 incidents were anti-U.S.,<sup>7</sup> putting Latin America far ahead of all other areas in this category.<sup>8</sup>

## **Democracy and Human Rights**

In keeping with our strategy of engagement and enlargement, democratization and human rights are (or should be) high priority U.S. national objectives for South America. The growth of democratic nations with market economies enhances the prospects for regional and global stability. While it is not true that democracies never wage war on each other (e.g., Peru and Ecuador), development of conflict resolution mechanisms and other cooperative measures are facilitated

between governments that have representative administrations and respect for the rule of law While no country in the hemisphere poses a direct security threat to the United States, in the absence of stability we have to contend with the incidental spill over effects, i.e., flows of illegal immigrants, the corrosive effects of illegal drugs, etc

“At the Miami Summit in December 1994, hemispheric leaders focused on the *modernization of the state*: creating transparent and accountable institutions, accessible and independent judiciaries, attacking corruption; and attending to the needs of *vulnerable groups* (indigenous people, the disabled, minorities, and others) ”<sup>9</sup>

With the exception of Cuba, all countries in Latin America are democratic to one degree or another Despite the gains of the past 15 years, however, direct threats to democracy still exist In 1992, for example, reactionary elements of the military twice attempted coups in Venezuela, a country that has one of the oldest constitutional democracies in the region This emphasizes the importance of strengthening the democratic institutions of South America through organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) as a mechanism to bring long-term growth and stability to the region

U.S. interests in the region also call for the promotion of human rights in South America as a way to foster long-term growth and stability This is accomplished through the spread of democracy and the rule of law

## **Future Outlook**

As we enter the 21st century, the outlook for future progress in South America is bright Great strides have been made to stem the authoritarian forces that dominated the past and held back the democratic self determination of the peoples of South America Now it is imperative that U.S. policy strengthen the ties with Latin America to capitalize on today’s window of opportunity to permanently transform the Western Hemisphere into a force for democracy Taking advantage of this window of opportunity will require the focused attention of U.S. foreign and national security

policy. The four policy initiatives outlined in this essay will simultaneously serve U.S. national interests and the aspirations of Latin America. Building civilian controlled military institutions, promoting economic prosperity, resolving transnational issues, and strengthening democracy, will directly result in peace and stability grounded in a firm respect for human dignity throughout the region. Establishing strong democratic, civil-military institutions will lower tensions and reinforce confidence within and among the nations of Latin America. The result will be a peaceful hemisphere free of weapons of mass destruction and associated delivery vehicles. Promoting economic prosperity through open and fair trade and building the FTAA will result in a new vibrant middle class to ensure sustained democratic and free market institutions. Creating the mechanisms to resolving transnational issues, such as border disputes, environmental degradation, and combating the drug trade, crime, and terrorism, will also support sustainable development. Finally, strengthening democracy will eliminate corruption, and promote peace and stability. This will be accomplished through the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In this context, U.S. foreign and national security policy will work with a revitalized OAS toward like-minded regional interests.

## Conclusion

In presenting the U.S. National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement the Clinton Administration states that, "The unprecedented triumph of democracy and market economies throughout the (Latin American) region offers an unparalleled opportunity to secure the benefits of peace and stability and to promote economic growth and trade. We remain committed to extending democracy to all of the region's people still blocked from controlling their own destinies. Our overarching objective is to preserve and defend civilian-elected governments and strengthen democratic practices respectful of human rights."<sup>10</sup> Thus, as Latin America emerges from the "lost decade," the United States is enthusiastically optimistic about the future of the region. However, this optimism must be tempered by the knowledge that the progress toward South American democratic market economies, defended by civilian controlled militaries, could be

undone. As we look forward to the turn of the century it is imperative that U S policy toward South America take a higher and more consistent profile than have the crisis based policies of the past. This policy must focus on adding depth to the 34 democratic, free market, nations of the Western Hemisphere. Additionally, U S policy must patiently and consistently work to bring freedom to Cuba, the single remaining non-democratic state in the Western Hemisphere. In short, our goal for the next decade is to strengthen the depth of democratic governments, free market economies, and civil control of the military throughout Latin America, using multilateral partnerships and bilateral relationships as outlined in the four policy initiatives in this essay. These policy initiatives capitalize on the historic opportunity presented to the Americas, spurred by the end of the Cold War, to set in place a vision of democratic peoples for the future and to manage the transition to these ends. This ultimately will turn the Americas into a beacon for democracy worldwide through an integrated partnership of like-minded nations. This strategy, pursued vigorously, will kindle the hopes of a new generation of Americans, North and South -- positively shifting the scales of liberty and adding brightness to the worldwide torch of freedom. As President Frei of Chile stated before the U S Congress on 27 February 1997, we are "brothers in the promotion of peace and democracy," we must "embrace this opportunity" and together we must "build a vision for this hemisphere."<sup>11</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> FBIS, *Ibero-American Presidents Give News Conference* (FBIS-LATIN-96-219 11 November 1996) p 2
- <sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Map of the Middle East A Guide for the Perplexed* (The American Scholar Winter 1989) p 38
- <sup>3</sup> International Affairs, *Ibero-American Presidents News Conference* (FBIS 11 November 1996)
- <sup>4</sup> The Economist, *A Survey of Mercosur, Remapping South America* (The Economist Newspaper Group October 12, 1996)
- <sup>5</sup> Latin Trade, *Macor Economic Report* (Source, The World Bank December 1996)
- <sup>6</sup> DOD, *United States Security Strategy for the Americas* (Washington D C ) p 15
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid
- <sup>8</sup> The Middle East was second in the number of anti-U S incidents with eight
- <sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, *United States Security Strategy for the Americas* (Washington, DC GPO, 1995) p 11
- <sup>10</sup> A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (The White House February 1996) p 42
- <sup>11</sup> President Eduardo Frei of Chile, Untitled Speech (Joint Session of the U S Congress February 27, 1997)